

YOUNG MARRIAGE OF HADHRAT AYESHA (ra)

The marriage of the Holy Prophet^{sa} with Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} when she was at quite a young age has been the focus of quite a bit of criticism in the West. Unfortunately, in this age some of those who profess to be Muslims have themselves become critics. Faced with the juggernaut of allegedly "universal" Western liberal values that have permeated almost everyone around them, they scathingly criticize such so-called "embarrassing" Islamic issues.

We need to make both Muslims and non-Muslims aware of not only the objective facts regarding the Holy Prophet^{sa}'s marriage to Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra}, but how to understand it in light of Islam and life in the "modern" world. That a man in his fifties would marry such a young girl—especially a man who is supposed to be a living example of piety—is not only difficult for many "modern" Westerners to come to terms with, but it has even gone so far as to stir up controversy amongst some Muslim intellectuals.

To have an atheist, agnostic—or anyone else who does not believe in a divinely revealed basis for morality—criticize something that is "politically incorrect" by today's moral standards comes as no surprise. Such people will always find something to criticize, since they simply have a bone to pick with "religion" in general. All of this "absolute morality" talk gets in the way of them having a good time, so they want to mock it, discredit it and do away with it.

One such person is the author of this document under discussion. He has contended that the marriage of Hadhrat Ayesha^(ra) at young age of 9 years with the Holy Prophet (sa) when he was 54, is in violation of the concept of universality of Islam, reasonableness and sets a bad example for future generations. I shall discuss these three objections, one at a time, and shall by the grace of God try to disprove them.

UNIVERSALITY AND REASONABLENESS

When we call something ‘universal’ we mean that this thing is useful and appropriately fits in all situations and circumstances. A hard and rigid system, unable to provide room for different situations, cannot be called universal. According to this definition, if Islam is a universal religion, which it is, then it should be expected to provide guidance for all kind of problems and adjusts to different cultures and societies. By the grace of Allah, the tenets of Islam provide us with the universal teachings and the life style of the Holy Prophet^{sa} provides us with the best example on how to implement these teachings in every aspect of our lives. The Holy Qur’an has very beautifully described the universality of personality and teachings of the Holy Prophet^{sa} by likening it to a light, “...neither of the East nor of the West...”[24:36] The spread of Islam in all continents is an ample proof of universal nature of Islam. Had it not been so, it wouldn’t have permeated in the hearts of people of every continent. In this modern age, Islam is still the largest spreading religion, not only in third world countries but also in the Western countries. Coming back to the Holy Prophet^{sa}, when we look towards him to seek guidelines and example in this particular issue of marriages, we find the befitting examples suited to different aspects of domestic life. The Holy Prophet^{sa} married with young and old; virgin and widowed/divorced; and free and slave women, thus showing us beacon light to act in any situation we come across in our society at any period or point of time in any culture. Out of all these marriages, marrying a young virgin is a unique incident of his life. Had the Holy Prophet^{sa} not married a young virgin, this aspect of a human domestic life would have left unattended by him without affording any example for such marriages.

REPERCUSSIONS OF SUNNAH

The author has undue concerns about disparity of age in marriages, apparently in those cases only where men are older than women and not in those where women are older than men. He has strong apprehension

that as the Muslims are prone to emulate the life of the Holy Prophet^{sa}, they relentlessly force their young daughters to marry much older ‘pious and religious’ men.

“As Muslims for centuries all over the world have studied the life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to gain insight into how to live their own lives, what Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did is very important to an understanding and appreciation of Islam.” (P-88)

“How many young girls throughout the ages have likely been married to older men several times their ages, not knowing what they were going into, all under the legitimate guise of Sunnah as a cover?” (P-90)

As evident from the above, the author is of the view that the marriage of the Holy Prophet^{sa} with Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} have repercussions for those young girls whose parents get them married with old but ‘pious and religious’ men following this Sunnah of the Holy Prophet^{sa}. It should be kept in mind that the first marriage of the Holy Prophet^{sa}, in his prime age of 25 years, was with Hadhrat Khadija^{ra} who was a two times widowed woman with children from her two earlier marriages. Ironically, the author has forgotten to describe, intentionally or otherwise, if this marriage had any repercussions over the Muslims; and if Muslim youth in their prime age are happily marrying widows at least 15 years older than them. On the other hand we seldom see in the Muslim society the occurrence of such marriages. The double standard of the Western society which the author has mentioned about marriage or even an affair of a 17 year old boy with a woman who was 43 is also true for Muslim society. I wonder why then, the author is so worried about the so-called perils of repercussions of marriage of Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} with the Holy Prophet^{sa}.

It is a common observation that not all marriages but only a few are perfectly matched. We see disparity of spouses in wealth, beauty, intellect and so many other social factors including age. In these modern times we still observe marriages with big spousal age gaps not only in a

Muslim society and culture, which the writer considers repercussions of the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet^{sa}, but also in Western culture where extremely wealthy old men marry young and beautiful damsels. Further, child marriage has been an integral part of Indian social custom for centuries, rather millennia. During the British rule, Indian legislative assembly passed a bill called ‘Sharda Bill’ which prohibited child marriages. Though child marriage is illegal in India now, but it is still commonly practiced in many villages and towns. May I ask the repercussions of whose Sunnah such marriages are in the Indian and Western society?

In our culture, parents with large number of children (many of whom are girls in many instances) overlook the disparity of age while seeking husbands for their daughters and the moment they find someone, they ease-off their burden by marrying their young daughters with men in their late forties or early fifties. By doing this they do not claim to follow the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet^{sa} but succumbing to social, financial and domestic pressure.

CHILD MARRIAGE FACT SHEET

Child marriage is not confined to Indian society, but also in other cultures and societies of the world, as evident from the following fact sheet prepared and issued by United Nations.

“Child Marriage Fact Sheet

According to UNFPA Child Marriage fact Sheet

Most countries have declared 18 as the minimum legal age of marriage. Despite the sanctions on child marriage, however, more than 100 million girls are expected to marry in the next decade.

While the practice has decreased globally over the last 30 years, it remains common in rural areas and among the poorest of the poor. Impoverished parents often believe that child marriage will protect their

daughters. In fact, however, it results in lost development opportunities, limited life options and poor health.

The practice of girls marrying young is most common in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. In other parts of Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, marriage at or shortly after puberty is common among some groups. In parts of Western and Eastern Africa and Southern Asia, the marriage of girls before puberty is not unusual.

In some countries, more than half of all girls under 18 are married. Specifically, the percentage of girls (aged 15 to 19) married by age 18 is:

- 76 percent in Niger
- 74 per cent in the Democratic Republic of Congo
- 54 per cent in Afghanistan
- 50 per cent in India
- 51 per cent in Bangladesh

While age at marriage is generally increasing, it is not uncommon to find girls married before age 15.

- In Ethiopia and some areas of West Africa, some girls get married as early as age 7.
- In Bangladesh, 45 per cent of young women between 25 and 29 were married by age 15.
- A 1998 survey in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh found that nearly 14 per cent of girls were married between the ages of 10 and 14.
- In Kebbi State of northern Nigeria, the average age of marriage for girls is just over 11 years, compared to a national average of 17.”
(www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_child_marriage.htm)

YOUNG AGE MARRIAGE—LAW OR CHOICE

The quoted text from Leila Ahmed's book by the author on P-91 clearly shows marrying a nine year old girl is not a fundamental injunction of Islam, upon which one's faith is based. On the contrary, these matters are susceptible to interpretation and can be viewed differently in different cultures and different times. Having said that, I assert that, as I said elsewhere as well, marrying a nine years old girl is only one unique instance in the life of the Holy Prophet^{sa} and he never made it incumbent upon his followers to adopt this practice. This matter is left on the choice of people; social conditions and requirements of any society. The following hadith proves this assertion wherein we see that the Holy Prophet^{sa} is not commanding but suggesting one of his companions, a man of young age, to marry a girl of his own age. This depicts a scenario about Islamic marriages quite different from what the author wishes us to believe:

Narrated Jabir bin 'Abdullah:

When I got married, Allah's Apostle said to me, "What type of lady have you married?" I replied, "I have married a matron' He said, "Why, don't you have a liking for the virgins and for fondling them?" Jabir also said: Allah's Apostle said, "Why didn't you marry a young girl so that you might play with her and she with you?" Volume 7, Book 62, Number 17:

This hadith, and some other like it in the Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, proves that the Holy Prophet^{sa} encouraged marriages of young men with young girls. Nonetheless, he neither declared it as an essential Islamic law nor out rightly banned it. It clearly shows then, that marriage issues are left to be decided according to personal choices, culture and customs of every society.

WISDOM BEHIND THIS MARRIAGE

The author has also not been able to see any ‘necessity’ of this marriage.

“...but for those who take exception to things such as the necessity for him to have married someone so young like Hazrat Aisha^{ra}...” (P-91)

The biographers of the Holy Prophet^{sa} and other scholars have mentioned many great wisdoms behind the marriages of the Holy Prophet^{sa} with women of different backgrounds. Confining our discussion to this marriage alone, one of the reasons and necessities mentioned behind his marriage with Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} is her training and imparting of education by none other than the Holy Prophet^{sa} himself. A person of relatively lesser age is more apt to learn and remember what he / she learnt in that younger age. Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} is a perfect example of this fact. She had a very sharp and intelligent mind since her childhood and as the Promised Messiah^{as} has stated in his book ‘Noor-ul-Haq’ (P-13), had a peculiar capacity to examine every religious edict on the standard of the Holy Qur’an. Having keenly observed and understood the life style of the Holy Prophet^{sa}, Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} became the most authentic source of hadith and Islamic law. She has related more than 2000 ahadith from the Holy Prophet^{sa}. The Holy Prophet^{sa} advised his followers to learn religion from her. Many great scholars of early centuries of Islam declared her the most learned women amongst all people. That is why she is called “معلمة نصف الدين” ‘teacher of half religion’. This reason alone is more than sufficient to justify the marriage of Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} with the Holy Prophet^{sa}.

MARRIAGE IS A LIFE LONG RELATIONSHIP

“When a marriage is conducted with such a disparity in ages, it is clear that the older spouse will die off so much earlier than the younger spouse. Has it not been the goal of people throughout history to aspire for a life long marriage relationship?”

“7.1 Why did Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) feel it necessary to ask for the hand of someone so young, knowing that she would outlive him by so many years?” (P-88)

This argument is so naïve and absurd that even a person with slightest intelligent can rebut it. Life and death of anyone is the most uncertain thing in the human history. We pray for the long life of both the spouses and we still aspire for life long relationship but no one can guarantee that the younger spouse shall always outlive the older spouse. Many a time younger spouse dies earlier than the older spouse.

The author is feeling pity and showing his concern and sympathy for Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} that her spouse^{sa} died much earlier than her. I wish he had shown the same feeling of remorse for the Holy Prophet^{sa} over the death of his most beloved wife, Hadhrat Khadija^{ra} when she died at a very critical stage of his life. Her death coupled with the death of Hadhrat Abu Talib, uncle of the Holy Prophet^{sa}, grieved the Holy Prophet^{sa} so much that he called the year of their death as ‘year of the grief’. But, we should keep in mind that, the purpose of this author’s document is to find faults in the life and teachings of the Holy Prophet^{sa}, not to show sympathy for him.

Secondly, Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} was not the only surviving wife of the Holy Prophet^{sa}. Other wives, much older than Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} also outlived the Holy Prophet^{sa}. The chart below shows, in ascending order, the year after Hijra in which the wives of the Holy Prophet^{sa} died, except Hadhrat Khadija^{ra} who died before the Holy Prophet^{sa} :

Name of the Wives of the Holy Prophet^{sa}	Year (A.H.) of Their Death
1. Hadhrat Zainab bint Khuzaima ^{ra}	4 (A.H.)
2. Hadhrat Maria Coptic ^{ra}	16 (A.H.)
3. Hadhrat Zainab bin Jahash ^{ra}	20 (A.H.)
4. Hadhrat Sawda ^{ra}	27 (A.H.)
5. Hadhrat Umm-e-Habiba ^{ra}	44 (A.H.)
6. Hadhrat Hafsa ^{ra}	45 (A.H.)
7. Hadhrat Safia ^{ra}	50 (A.H.)
8. Hadhrat Jawaria ^{ra}	56 / 56 A.H.
9. Hadhrat Maimoona ^{ra}	51 (A.H.)
10. Hadhrat Ayesha ^{ra}	58 (A.H.)
11. Hadhrat Umm-e-Salma ^{ra}	58 (A.H.)

This comparison clearly shows that Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} was, apparently, neither the only surviving wife of the Holy Prophet^{sa} nor the only wife who outlived him for a considerable amount of time.

RELIGIOUS LAW OR CULTURAL NORM

According to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, right and wrong are ordained by Almighty God. As such, morality does not change over time based on our whims, desires or cultural sensitivities. In cultures where there is no divinely revealed ruling on an issue, what is right and what is wrong is determined by cultural norms. In such cases, a person would only be considered "immoral" if they violated the accepted norms of their society. As it shall be shown later, the marriage of the Holy Prophet^{sa} to Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra}, viewed both in the light of Absolute Morality and the cultural norms of his time, was not an immoral act, but was an act containing valuable lessons for generations to come. Further, this marriage followed the norms for all Semitic peoples, including those of Biblical times. Based on this and other information it is grossly hypocritical to criticize the marriage of the Holy Prophet^{sa} to Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} at such a young age.

Based on the culture at that time, no one saw anything wrong with it. On the contrary, they were all happy about it. None of the Muslim sources report that anyone from the society at that time criticized this marriage due to the young age of Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra}. On the contrary, her marriage with the Holy Prophet^{sa} was encouraged by her father, Hadhrat Abu Bakr^{ra}, and was welcomed by the community at large. Due to the Semitic culture in which they lived, they certainly saw nothing wrong with such a marriage. The author has admittedly mentioned this fact.

“That girls and boys in pre-Islamic Arabia were married in childhood is more of a cultural and temporal phenomena that is not being taken exception here.” (P-88)

He has also admitted the fact that:

“Surprisingly, one can find today, biographers of Hazrat Aisha^{ra} such as Nabia Abbot (referred to in Leila Ahmed’s book), who do not feel the disparity in ages was the relevant matter as regards the relationship:”

After quoting the relevant paragraph from Leila Ahmed’s book which states that disparity of age between spouses is not a relevant issue, the author expressed his disagreement over this idea without offering any plausible reason for it:

“Now independent scholars may feel that the disparity in ages was not the relevant issue but indeed it is when looking at the big picture—especially when the repercussions of Sunnah are concerned.” (P-90)

HADHRAT AYESHA ALREADY BETROTHED

When Khawla^{ra} presented to Umm-e-Rumaan, mother of Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra}, the proposal of the marriage of Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} with the Holy Prophet^{sa}, she responded that Ayesha^{ra} is already betrothed to someone. It means that betrothal at young age was not an unusual custom for them. At another instance, when the Holy Prophet^{sa} discussed

this proposal with Hadhrat Abu Bakr^{ra} he expressed his astonishment over the already established brotherly relationship between him and the Holy Prophet^{sa} by exclaiming, “but I am your brother” and not over the disparity of age between Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} and the Holy Prophet^{sa}.

THE MARRIAGES OF THE DAUGHTERS OF THE HOLY PROPHET^{sa}

Islamic history tells us that the Holy Prophet^{sa} also got his daughters married at that tender age. Hadhrat Ruqayya^{ra} and Hadhrat Umm-e-kalthum^{ra} were betrothed to two brothers, Utba and Utaiba, even before the claim of prophethood by the Holy Prophet^{sa}. Both were divorced later and remarried to Hadhrat Uthman^{ra} one after the death of other, and that too in small ages.

The criticism of the marriage of the Holy Prophet^{sa} to Hadhrat^{ra} is something relatively new, in that it grew up out of the values of "Post Enlightenment" Europe. This was a Europe that had abandoned (or at least modified) its religious morality for a new set of humanist values where people used their own opinions to determine what was right and wrong.

Certainly, those from a Middle Eastern Semitic background would not have found anything to criticize, since nothing abnormal or immoral took place. It was European Christians who began to criticize the Holy Prophet^{sa} on this point, not ones who were in touch with their Semitic roots.

The Macropaedia Britannica makes it clear that young marriages were prevalent until recent past in Europe and United States and that values regarding the proper age of marriage have been changing over the years:

“...every past or present society has had its own concept of marriage, and many have created marriage laws that reflect their particular cultural standards and expectations concerning the institution.”

“The marriage law of most western European nations and that of the United States (which is itself based on English marriage law) is the product of Roma Catholic cannon law that has been greatly modified by the changed cultural and social conditions of modern industrialized and urbanized life...The age limits for marriage, which formerly permitted 12-year-olds or **even younger persons to marry**, have been revised upward in most countries between 15 and 21 years of age. (Under article ‘Marriage’ Vol-7, P-872)

MARRIAGE IN JEWISH CULTURE

Ancient Israelite Marriage Customs

by [Jim West, ThD](#)

“Though there are some cultures in the Ancient Near East which were matriarchal in structure, Israel's was not one of them. Israel's family life was dominated by the husband (Pedersen, p. 61). When a marriage occurred the husband took his wife from her home and "ruled" over her, following the pattern of Genesis 3:16: To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." (Preuss, p. 103)..."

“The wife was to be taken from within the larger family circle (usually at the outset of puberty or around the age of 13) in order to maintain the purity of the family line; but she could not be too closely related as is shown by Leviticus 18.

WHO IS STANDARD—THE HOLY PROPHET^{sa} OR FUTURE GENERATIONS

“How could a Prophet who came to set an example for all time be a party to something like this which future generations would hold as something so distasteful?” P-92

The above quotation conveys the message that the standard and criterion to judge the validity or otherwise of any social norm is not the teachings and deeds of a prophet but of ‘future generations’ who are being held supreme to accept something as ‘tasteful’ and reject other as ‘distasteful’. A critical question arises here that, as the social and cultural norms are constantly changing, what future generations shall say about us and how fiercely they will criticize us over our ‘primitive’ and unfair attitude towards women of our times.

ALTERNATE OPINIONS ABOUT HER AGE

Hadhrat Mirza Bashir Ahmad Sahib^{ra} has presented another view about her age at the time of her marriage. He based his opinion on a tradition narrated by Ibn-e-Sa’ad in his ‘Tabaqat’ that Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} was borne in the beginning of 4th year of Nabuwwah. He has stated that as the Holy Prophet^{sa} migrated from Makkah in the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal of 14th Nabuwwah, the age of Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} at the time of migration comes to few months more than 10 years. She got married in the month of Shawwal of 2 A.H. Thus the difference between migration and her marriage is few months less than two years. By adding up this period with her age at the time of migration, which is few months more than 10 years, gives us her age of 12 years at the time of her marriage.

Hadhrat Mirza Bashir Ahmad Sahib^{ra} is of the view that her age mentioned as 6 or 7 at the time of betrothal are mere speculations and guess works as it was not the custom at that time to keep record of birth. He has also stated that if we accept her age as 9 years at the time of

marriage, even than it is not objectionable as certain girls obtain their puberty in that age and are consequently ready to be married.

Some other Muslim scholars, on the basis of some ahadith and historical reports, are of the view that Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} was actually 18 or 19 years of age when she got married to the Holy Prophet^{sa}.

➤ First evidence presented in this regard is from “Tareekh-e-Tabari” compiled by Allama Abi Ja’afar Muhammad bin Jareel Al-Tabari. We find the following information from it:

“Ali bin Muhammad relates that Abu Bakr^{ra} married Qutaila during the time of ignorance. Waqdi and kalbi also agree with this tradition...From Qutaila borne Abdullah and Asmaa. Also in the time of ignorance he married Umm-e-Rumaan ...She bore him Abdul Rahman and Ayesha. All of his four children which are mentioned here were borne during the time of ignorance.” (Tareekh-e-Tabari Vol 1 Part-II, P-250)

➤ Second argument offered in their support is that Ibn-e-Hashām, a very authentic and one of the earliest biographers of the Holy Prophet^{sa} has mentioned her name amongst the earliest converts who accepted the Holy Prophet^{sa} right after his claim of prophethood. It means that she was borne before his claim of prophethood and was a small girl at that time, as Ibn-e-Hashām has mentioned “وهي يومئذ صغيرة” She was small girl on that day” (Vol-1, P-202)

➤ Third argument is based on a hadith which is in Bukhari Kitab al-Tafseer.

“Narrated Yusuf bin Mahak: I was in the House of Ayesha, Mother of the Believers. She said, “This revelation: ‘Nay, but the Hour is their appointed time (for their full recompense), and the Hour will be more grievous and more bitter’ (54:47) was revealed to Muhammad^{sa} at Makkah while I was a playful girl.”

It is contended that as this sura is unanimously believed to be revealed in Makkah in 5th year of Nabuwwah, then, as Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} according to her own statement was a playing child in fifth year of Nabuwwah and she remembers the revelation of that particular verse, she must be at least 5 or 6 years of age at the time of revelation of this verse.

➤ Fourth argument is presented from Tareekh-e-Ibn-e-Katheer, which says that Hadhrat Asmaa^{ra}, elder sister of Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} died in the year 73 A.H. at the age of 100 years. She was 10 years elder than Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra}. It means that Hadhrat Asmaa^{ra} was 27 at the time of Hijra and Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra}, being 10 years younger than her was 17. This historical report and calculation of her age proves that she was 18 when she was married to the Holy Prophet^{sa}.

➤ Their fifth argument is based on the words used for a child girl and an adult virgin. After the death of Hadhrat Khadija^{ra}, Hadhrat Khawla^{ra} asked the Holy Prophet^{sa} to marry again. When he asked whom should I marry, Hadhrat Khawla^{ra} said, “بكر وثيب” which means that there is a virgin and there is a widow. By virgin she meant Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} and by widow she meant Hadhrat Sawda^{ra}. These scholars contend that no Arab person use the word “بكر” for a 6 years old girl. The word used for the girls who have not attained the age of puberty is “جارية”. Nobody calls small girls as virgin. There is a hadith in Bukhari Kitab al-Tafseer, chapter ‘To marry Virgins’ in which confirms that Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} was ‘بكر’ (virgin) at the time of her marriage and not ‘جارية’ (child girl).

➤ وَ قَالَ ابْن ابى مليكة: قال ابن عباس لعائشة: لم ينكح النبى صلى الله عليه وسلم بكرة غيرك

Ibn ‘Abbās said to ‘Āishah, “The Prophet (sa) did not marry any virgin besides you.”

This point is further supported by another hadith already mentioned above:

Narrated Jabir bin 'Abdullah:

When I got married, Allah's Apostle said to me, "What type of lady have you married?" I replied, "I have married a matron' He said, "Why, don't you have a liking for the virgins and for fondling them?" Jabir also said: Allah's Apostle said, "Why didn't you marry **a young girl** so that you might play with her and she with you?" Volume 7, Book 62, Number 17:

The bold words are translation of word 'جارية' used in that hadith. This linguistic background proves, these scholars contend, that Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} was an adult virgin and not a child girl at the time of her marriage with the Holy Prophet^{sa}.

The above discussion quite satisfactorily reflects that the marriage of Hadhrat Ayesha^{ra} at a young age of 9 years is not unanimously believed fact amongst the Islamic researchers and scholars. Secondly, no objection is raised even if we agree that she was 9 at the time of her marriage as it was in conformity with the cultural norms of that society and still practiced in this modern age. Finally, the Holy Prophet^{sa} did not set a bad precedence and the Muslim Ummah has not taken it as an excuse to marry their daughters at such young age.